

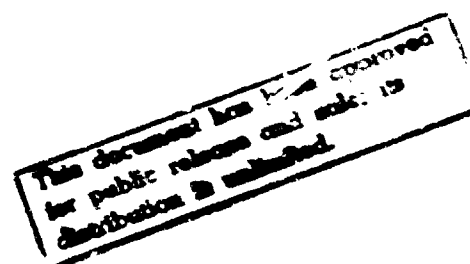
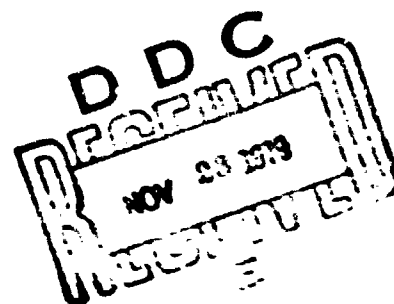
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SOME EXPERIENCES REPORTED BY THE CREW OF THE USS PUEBLO
AND AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR FROM VIETNAM

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Some Experiences Reported by the Crew of the USS Pueblo and
American Prisoners of War from Vietnam *

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American Prisoners of War from Vietnam

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast experiences reported by crew members of the USS PUEBLO and returned prisoners of the Vietnam War (RPW). Only men who served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam crisis are included among the RPW group since the author's personal experience was limited to this population. Demographically, the two groups of men were different (See Table 1) and their experiences during capture and incarceration were also different. The PUEBLO crew was captured as a group, incarcerated as a group, and released as a group. The RPWs were captured singly and imprisoned, in most cases, in separate cells. Both groups, however, were imprisoned for variable periods of time in Oriental countries.

In order to appreciate fully the stresses encountered by these two groups of men, it seems appropriate to discuss:

- a) background information regarding their capture;
- b) the incarceration period; and
- c) their return and medical follow-up

A

Background Information

On January 23, 1968 the USS PUEBLO (AGER-2), Auxiliary General Electronic Research Ship, was attacked, boarded and captured by North Koreans in international waters and taken to Manson Harbor in North Korea.

"Thus the USS PUEBLO became the first United States warship captured without a fight since June 22, 1807, when HMS Leopard forced the USS CHESAPEAKE to surrender off the Virginia capes and impressed four of its crew into the British Navy." (Brandt 1969)

During the attack one Pueblo crewman was killed and seven others sustained shrapnel wounds -- two of which were serious. The absence of shredding devices or effective destructive mechanisms made the task of completely destroying the electronic equipment and classified material aboard the ship impossible.

In contrast to the USS Pueblo crew, who had been captured as a group, the naval aviators that were shot down while flying combat missions over North Vietnam were captured singly from 1964 until January 1973. These naval aviators, who were operating from carriers located in the Tonkin Gulf, were flying frequent missions, the targets of which varied from ammunition dumps, bridges, trucks, and troops, to gun and missile sites. The aviators were generally confident of their technical proficiency as pilots and for the most part, their squadron morale was high.

Aviators became casualties for two major reasons: (1) fatigue and (2) errors in decision-making that were the causes. The pilots were able to evade capture only briefly, since they generally landed in

rice paddies or near small villages. One hundred and thirteen, or 82 percent of the total group of 138 were wounded at the time of shoot down or ejection from their aircraft (See Table 2).

Once on the ground the situation for the pilot was fairly standard; he was usually attacked by farmers who used bamboo poles, fists, or the flat side of a machete, and his clothes were stripped away from him and all his personal property confiscated.

Transfer of the prisoners to regular North Vietnamese Army personnel was accomplished by marching the men at night to a designated pick-up point. The prisoners spent the daylight hours in villages where they were on display for the villagers who might take the opportunity to strike or spit upon them. Several incidents of serious attempts to murder the prisoners were reported. The time necessary to transport the Americans to Hanoi varied from as little as several hours to as long as two weeks. During this phase of the capture, many of the wounded prisoners prayed to die, they suffered excruciating pain, shock, blood loss, and delirium which often included hallucinations.

Thus, the capture experience was very different for the two groups -- the Pueblo crew was captured by a country in which no overt hostile acts were being committed, whereas the naval aviators were in combat action, and a significant number severely injured at the time of capture.

Incarceration

Once having arrived in Manson Harbor, the Pueblo crew was quickly transferred by train to Pyongyang and imprisoned in a building known to

the men as 'the barn'. The Commanding Officer was isolated from the others, who were quartered three or four to a room. Crew members were threatened with death, interrogated, and some were severely beaten. "Confessions" as to "criminal aggressive acts" were obtained from all crew members as a result of these threats and ill-treatment.

In March the crew was transferred to other accommodations near military installations, where officers had their own rooms and enlisted men were housed generally eight to a room. Their treatment by the North Koreans varied; in general the living quarters, sanitation facilities and medical care were unsatisfactory by western standards. Food was deficient both in quality and quantity. Physical maltreatment was concentrated in two specific periods--the first three weeks (i.e. until all had "confessed") and a "purge" two weeks prior to release in an effort to obtain names of those crew members who had attempted to communicate their lack of sincerity to the western world. (Propaganda photographs often showed smiling faces in association with obscene gestures.) Physical abuse consisted of fist assaults or kicks in the head or groin. Several crew members who were forced to squat with an inch square stick behind their knees reported losing consciousness and, as a result of the beatings, one man had a fractured jaw. Through lectures, field trips and written material, the North Koreans attempted to convince crew members of the injustices of their "imperialist" government.

Quite unexpectedly on December 19, 1968 the purge for "confessions" was discontinued abruptly and on December 21, 1968 the Pueblo crew in its entirety was returned to South Korea.

Processing for the American aviator EPWs at Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi became standardized. At first each American prisoner was isolated either in a holding cell or an interrogation room. Interrogation, which began shortly after arrival, was accompanied by torture if the prisoner failed to give more than his name, rank, service number and date of birth. Torture was applied expertly to produce pain and to force answers to finite questions. The method of torture most frequently used has been described as follows:

The prisoner was forced to sit on the floor with his legs straightened out in front of him and an iron bar was secured to the ankles. Arms, straightened and behind the prisoner, were secured by ropes or straps which had been laced tightly from the armpits to just below the elbows. The prisoner's head was then pushed down towards his feet, producing not only severe pain but also causing difficulty with respiration and, in many, a feeling of claustrophobia. If a prisoner failed to respond, an interrogator would slowly tighten the ropes while standing on the prisoner's back. This procedure, which cut off the circulation in the arms, resulted in swelling and excruciating pain. Initial torturing sessions lasted from several hours to several days, depending on the individual's stamina. Eventually all American prisoners

were persuaded to answer questions and many were tortured to write "confessions". Wounded men were tortured as severely as the others but, unlike the non-wounded, the promise of medical attention was held out to them as a further inducement to cooperate--a promise which, in some cases, was never realized.

Prisoners were held in solo cells that were small, filthy, and neither ventilated or heated. Beds consisted of wooden pallets or cement slabs with one blanket and a mosquito net provided for each of the prisoners. A container for human excreta was placed in the cell and emptied once a day. Prisoners were frequently reminded that they were criminals and were forbidden to communicate with fellow prisoners. Severe beatings or prolonged periods of isolation were given to those prisoners caught communicating covertly. Yet, in spite of the prison rules, the men organized themselves and followed a chain of command which issued their resistance orders.

The supply of food given to each man was inadequate; it consisted of two meals a day and varied in quality and quantity from one prison to the next. At first, weight loss among these men was pronounced. After October 1969 the food supply was increased and prisoners actually gained back some of their lost weight. To keep the body in shape, most prisoners developed an intensive program of daily exercise for themselves within the confines of their small cells.

Eventually, as greater numbers of prisoners of war were brought to Hanoi, some had to be housed together. In 1970, the numbers had grown to

such proportions that larger rooms had to be constructed to house perhaps 40 men. However, even after 1970, the more senior prisoners remained isolated from the majority of the others.

Generally, then, the incarceration of the Pueblo crew was not as prolonged as that of the RPWs from Vietnam, nor was the treatment as physically, psychologically or environmentally as severe. The Pueblo crew was encouraged to function as a group, whereas the RPWs from Vietnam were hindered in any attempts at group functioning. Isolated from their leaders, the RPWs from Vietnam were able to organize only through sheer determination, ingenuity, and military experience.

Coping

When the Pueblo crew members were asked about the methods they employed to cope with their incarceration, they frequently stated that they maintained faith in their Commanding Officer, in their religion and in their country. It was apparent that considerable group support was provided by the leaders in each room. Some rooms operated like leaderless group therapy sessions; there was ample time for extended review of each individual's life, his hopes, accomplishments and aspirations.

Among the ego-defensive mechanisms most effectively used by those Pueblo crew members who were better able to tolerate the stress were: faith, reality testing, denial, rationalization and humor. Following capture, these men sized up the situation, made decisions as to how they would individually handle the stress, and then stopped being preoccupied with

each subsequent event. In effect, they consciously allowed themselves to use more primitive defenses. These men were secure in their identity as Americans, were confident they would not be abandoned, and maintained important object relations through fantasy and anticipation of reunion. A quality of confident self-identity characterized the group (Ford, 1973).

Those members of the Pueblo crew who tolerated the stress poorly used fewer ego-defensive mechanisms. These men's dependent personalities were in apparent conflict with their desires to give in to their dependent longings and to please their captors or to maintain a more independent stance. Without the considerable group support generated by the crew, these men would have fared much worse.

Although it has been postulated that the PRs from Vietnam used many coping mechanisms, the analysis of that data has not as yet been quantitatively or qualitatively accomplished. The utilization of acting out i.e., breaking the prison rules, devising methods of communication and intellectualizing appeared to be effective ego-defensive mechanisms. Projection was intensified by their isolation and the presence of external persecutory agents--the captors, who provided the prisoners with a logical source of projection for their difficulties. This finding was confirmed by the prisoners who reported that later in their captivity, when in close association with fellow prisoners, they became less tolerant, more irritable and projected their anger towards them.

fellow inmates. Several prisoners reported depression following prolonged isolation; however, reconstitution to their pre-arrest personality was achieved soon after the complete isolation was terminated.

Thus, both groups of men used a variety of defensive mechanisms to cope with the environmental, physical and psychological stresses of incarceration and uncertainty. Those who were healthier were the most successful--those individuals who could utilize effectively a variety of ego-defensive mechanisms and could be flexible. Many of the men commented that the only things they had going for them when isolated were their own intelligence and personal characteristics.

Method of Evaluation

Upon their return to the Continental United States, each Pueblo crew member was admitted to the Naval Hospital, San Diego, California and given a thorough physical and psychiatric examination. The psychiatric examination consisted of a private interview lasting at least one hour. Some crew members were seen on more than one occasion, either at their own request or because further evaluation was indicated by the examining psychiatrist. Each crew member completed a standard form, containing demographic and background information, as well as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and a sentence completion test. The information obtained from these tests and clinical observations was recorded on forms by the examining psychiatrist. This allowed a systematic comparison of the different psychiatrists' impressions.

as well as a means of detailing symptoms, pre-morbid personality characteristics, and similar information (Spaulding, 1972).

For the RPAs from Vietnam there had been considerable preparation planned for their homecoming. Each returnee was sent to the military hospital that was closest in proximity to the current residence of his primary next-of-kin. Extensive physical examinations as well as laboratory tests were performed and recorded. Psychiatric interviews were accomplished and a format of pre-arranged information was recorded for subsequent analysis. Indicated definitive medical, dental, or psychiatric treatment was instituted at once. Thus, although there had been extensive planning for the return of the RPAs from Vietnam, but no preparation for the return of the Pueblo crew, both groups received intensive physical and psychiatric examinations.

Initial Findings

When the men of the Pueblo were first seen, they generally appeared subdued, voiced concern about wanting to see their families, and demonstrated no evidence of overt thought disorder. The majority of the crew seemed mildly depressed or anxious, although almost all the men denied such feelings. There was a major contradiction between the verbalized affect and that which the examiners observed. For example, such comments as "this is the happiest day of my life" were not associated with euphoria.

The crew initially remained a well integrated group. Individuals remained identified with the crew as a whole and daily military routine

was maintained. After three weeks of hospitalization, most were found fit for limited duty and were scheduled for re-evaluation three months later. It was anticipated that this was the time at which the Board of Inquiry would have completed its investigations.

At the time of the re-evaluation, the difference in the crew as a whole was striking. In contrast to the initially bland, group oriented, cooperative demeanor observed, many men were openly antagonistic and hostile towards both the Navy and their fellow crew members, despite the fact that the findings of the Board of Inquiry were more benign than initially anticipated by the crew. At this time there was evidence of considerable acting out, excessive use of alcohol and drugs, minor traffic violations and squandered back pay. In addition, there have since been unofficial reports of marital discord and divorce, psychiatric hospitalizations and one death due to carbon monoxide poisoning. A more detailed follow-up evaluation of these men has recently been proposed.

The RPWs from Vietnam, on their arrival in the United States, were generally excited and seemingly happy. Yet, it was apparent relatively soon after their return that many of them were suffering from what was termed by one of the RPWs as "sensory overload". There was so much input being received visually, auditorially, and interpersonally, relative to what they had been used to while in prison, that they were having difficulty in assimilating all the stimuli. This state persisted for several days and hospital schedules were rearranged to allow them more free time.

The officers, who had not had the luxury while in prison of making decisions or refusing to do something, experienced some difficulty for awhile, especially until they learned to say "No".

The psychiatric diagnoses established for the Pueblo crew were as follows: one depressive neurosis, one obsessive compulsive neurosis, and one paranoid personality (See Table 3). Examining psychiatrists noted as diagnostic impressions, but did not make a formal diagnoses, (See Table 4) the following:

situational anxiety	5
passive dependent personality	4
passive aggressive personality	3
schizoid personality	2
chronic anxiety	1
reactive depression	4

The RPWs from Vietnam, on the other hand, had three reported cases of situational anxiety and one depressive reaction. Three were noted to be utilizing alcohol to excess immediately following their repatriation.

For most prisoners of war there appears to have been sufficient stress to evoke massive repressive defenses and these accounted for the somewhat bland and apathetic appearance of the men upon release after World War II (Greenson 1949). Further evidence that massive repression was evoked as an acute defensive mechanism is suggested in the case of the Pueblo crew and the RPWs from Vietnam by the observation that several

weeks after their return there was considerable expressed anger and acting out. This was seen as a release phenomenon where the repressed emotion was expressed and worked through. There is a suggestion that, for at least some of the returned prisoners of the Vietnam War, the stress of captivity was not mastered easily. Reports of suicides and psychotic depression, in addition to multiple interpersonal conflicts with family members, suggest that the long-range psychological response to severe stress may be much greater than the acute reaction.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Pueblo Crew
And American RPWs (Navy) from Vietnam

	USS PUEBLO (N = 82)	RPWs (N = 138)
Officers	6	138
Enlisted - Navy	72	0
Enlisted - Marine	2	0
Civilians	2	0
Time in Captivity	11 months	61.7 months (mean)
Mean age at Captivity	25.4 years	30.8 years
Mean education level achieved	12.2 years	15.2 years
Marital status at captivity		
Married	42.7%	74.6%
Single	53.7%	24.7%
Divorced	2.4%	0.7%
Separated	1.2%	0%

Table 2
Injuries Reported by American RPMs from Vietnam
(N = 138)

<u>Injury</u>	<u>Number of Men Who Incurred Injury</u>	<u>Medical Treatment Received</u>
When Aircraft Hit	37	24
During Ejection	76	46
During Parachute Decent or Landing	36	11
During Fire Fight or by Booby Trap	2	2
During Escape or Evasion Activity	5	2
In any other Way Before Being Captured	4	1
While Being Captured	35	20

Table 3
Psychiatric Diagnoses
Made During Initial Psychiatric Evaluation

	<u>Pueblo Crew</u>	<u>Vietnam RPM Group</u>
Depressive Neurosis	1	1
Obsessive Compulsive Neurosis	1	0
Paranoid Personality	1	0
Situational Anxiety	0	1
Incidence Rate	.037	.014

Table 4
Impressionistic Findings
Revealed by the Initial Psychiatric Evaluation

	<u>Pueblo Crew</u>	<u>Vietnam RPM Group</u>
Situational Anxiety	5	0
Reactive Depression	4	0
Passive Dependent Personality	4	0
Passive Aggressive Personality	3	0
Schizoid Personality	2	0
Chronic Anxiety	1	0
Episodic Excessive Drinking	0	3

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21. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) The 82 crew members of the USS Pueblo were evaluated psychiatrically 48 to 72 hours after their release from 11 months of imprisonment in North Korea. Slightly more than half of the crew admitted to experiencing significant anxiety or depression during captivity. A group of men defined as coping with the stress well was compared to a group who tolerated it poorly. Those who did well tended to use a wide variety of ego-defense mechanisms, particularly faith, reality testing, denial, rationalization, and humor. (cont.)		

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Men in the group defined as handling the stress poorly were more limited in the number of ego-defense mechanisms utilized.

The American prisoners of war imprisoned in Vietnam were for the most part career officers, trained as pilots. The duration of incarceration was variable, lasting from over eight years to several months. A composite profile will be presented including the stresses encountered with capture, imprisonment and repatriation. The methods of coping with these variable stresses will be discussed. A personal impression will be offered regarding the most important factors of the captured Americans' success.

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